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ABSTRACT

A Japanese university course in English as a Second Language is described. The course focuses on developing students' independent learning skills. It consists of a series of learning modules, each focusing on a particular learning resource available to anyone in Japan. The resources recommended for independent acquisition of different language skills, categorized here by skill area (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) include publications, group and individual activities, travel, organizations, and techniques for creating or maximizing language practice opportunities. Each instructional module provides information on a different kind of resource, including information on locating it and arranging for delivery of or access to it. Students are also guided through an exercise in using the resource and taught criteria (interest, intelligibility, and feasibility) for selecting resources for themselves. Each student is required to keep a diary of occasions on which he has used an English learning resource. Students are encouraged to use their imagination and draw on experience. It is suggested that the course is successful in sensitizing students to learning opportunities. (Contains 9 references.) (MSE)

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RESOURCES FOR THE INDEPENDENT E.F.L. LEARNER IN JAPAN

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Introduction

The concept of an autonomous learner studying without a text-book is a relatively new one in Japan. A heritage of Confucian ideas has been combined with strong centralised planning (Dore 1984) to make a transmission-model of education, involving teacher and text-book as the means of transmission, not only the traditional model but for many people the only model. From the traditional image of the priest in a temple-school surrounded by children eager for revealed truths from the sutras (Dore 1984) to the modern, surprisingly low-tech. classroom where the teacher expounds on the mysteries of the text-book while students listen and take notes (Rohlen 1983), the teacher and text-book are seen as the source of learning. Indeed, Miller (1982, p.45-48) has pointed out that this pattern is reproduced even on television, where educational programmes more often than not consist of a straight lecture to the camera in which viewers are referred to the text-book, "available from local book stores."

This cultural pattern is no less true for language education than it is for any other subject. However, in recent years

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there has been an explosion of resources in the country which could be used by language learners to improve their knowledge of English without the intermediaries of teacher or text-book. Indeed, although Japan is considered an EFL environment, in terms of the availability of resources for self-instruction it is coming more and more to resemble an ESL one.

This paper describes attempts to awaken EFL students to the possibilities of these resources and to encourage them to make use of them once they graduate from college and leave teachers and text-books behind.

The Students

The students are all enrolled in a 4-year engineering university in Osaka, Japan. They are on their way to careers as engineers and architects and their attention is focussed on acquiring the technical and professional skills essential to their working lives.

As part of a programme of general education, the university provides them with 2 lessons of English language instruction a week. This comes after 6 years of English study in junior high school and high school, largely focussed on passing the English test required for admission to the university. With the pressure of entrance exam. preparation removed and their main attention focussed elsewhere, most students do not see English lessons as important or even relevant to their future plans, except for the thought that they may, at some point, take a trip abroad for pleasure.

In this judgement the students are sorely deceived. Graduates of the university have a high probability of working for a company (OIT Campus Guide 1993, p.46) which will send them to work abroad for an extended stay (a year or more). Whichever country they are sent to, it is likely that English will be the lingua franca between Japanese staff and their non-Japanese associates. Although such companies usually provide English lessons to those about to be sent abroad, they come amidst a host of other pressures and practical problems which severely limit the time and attention that can be devoted to mastering the language at that point.

Here, it was felt, was a strong case for encouraging learner-autonomy, so that, even in the first hectic years of a career, when it would be extremely difficult to make a commitment to attend English lessons regularly, graduates could improve (or at least maintain) their English by themselves.

The Course

It was decided to include, as part of the regular English course, an element that would alert the students to their probable future need of the language and encourage them to make use of the rich language-learning resources around them. The goal was not to transform them into autonomous learners during the period of the course but to show them what possibilities were available to them should they feel the need or desire to pursue their English studies at a later date.

The course consisted of modules, each focussing on a particular resource and containing information on obtaining and techniques for using the resource as well as an introduction to the principles that lie behind the techniques. A previous paper (Ryan, in press) outlines the methodology and procedures of the course. This paper will focus on the resources involved.

The Resources

After partially recovering from the initial shock of exoticism, first-time visitors to Japan are often surprised at the amount of English encountered in daily life (Barry 1992, p. 121).

Not all of this English is useful for self-instructed language-learning. It has been estimated that up to 10% of daily Japanese consists of recent loan-words from foreign languages, overwhelmingly English (Neustupny, 1987: 84-5). Words like *hideo* (video), *kopiraitaa* (copywriter) and *shanpuu* (shampoo) abound but the pronunciation of these words is often so mangled in stretching them to fit the Japanese syllabic pattern (CVCV) that they are unrecognisable to native speakers of English. This is compounded by the fact that the original words are often abbreviated (*hansuto* [hun sto] is hunger strike and *pasokon* [perso com] is personal computer), and the user of the word usually does not know its origin. Furthermore, the meaning of the words is often mangled too, so that *manshon* (mansion) is used for an apartment and *dokutaa sutoppu* (doctor stop) means "my doctor has told me to stop drinking."[1]

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[1]For a fuller listing of such words, see Webb (1988).

Research into the origin of such words can be interesting and informative but is probably best not left to the unsupervised learner.

A further source of unhelpful English is the advertising and fashion industries which have taken to adorning their products with snippets of foreign languages, again with English predominating. T-shirts, bags, posters, pencil-cases, exercise books, even TV ads. bear strange, meaningless and often ungrammatical messages: "I love my puffing boy" "Lets enjoying piece in natural" "Live beer for live people." Fortunately most of this is regarded as decoration rather than a source of living English by most Japanese people so the amusement it provides for visiting foreigners is mainly harmless. However, when encouraging students to make use of the English in their environment, it is probably best to warn them off anything produced by the fashion or advertising industries.

Of the useful English resources that abound in Japan, some are designed for instructional purposes (i.e. intentionally designed to teach English) and others are designed primarily to inform or entertain the resident foreign population.

In the catalogue which follows, the resources are organised by the language skill they can best be used to develop. Multiple-use resources appear several times under different headings:

Catalogue of Resources Available to Independent EFL Learners in Japan
Reading
Graded readers, such as Oxford Bookworms (OUP), Longman Easystarts or Longman Originals (Longman), Variety Readers (Cambridge) or the domestically produced Ladder Series (Yohan).
Magazines and newspapers produced for learners of English (eg. Mini-world[2])
Novels (especially, books that have been turned into movies or are based on a movie)
Movie scripts, like those in the Screenplay series (Fooin Creative Products).
Technical manuals for particular hobbies (eg. computers, ham-radio)
Foreign news-magazines (Time, Newsweek)
Foreign newspapers (USA Today, NY Times - often available in college libraries)
Japan's English language daily newspapers (available at station book-stores throughout the country, can also be delivered to homes)
Foreign magazines - general interest
Foreign magazines - particular hobbies or sports
Locally-produced magazines for foreign residents (Kansai Time Out is a regional, monthly publication giving entertainment listings in English)

[2]Produced by Mini-World Inc., Hirose Bldg. 1-13-12 Sekiguchi, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 112.

Language-based computer games, designed for native speaker users (eg,. the Carmen Sandiego [Broderbund] series)
Computer games designed to teach English (eg. Uncle Waldo's Will [Intersoft])
Letters from pen-friends
Writing
Letters to pen-friends
Letters to an English-language newspaper
Articles to submit to magazine for English learners
Poems, short-stories or video-scripts for fiction competitions (organised by local English-language newspapers and magazines)
Guide book to the local area for foreign visitors/ residents
Computer games designed to teach English
Keep a diary/journal in English
Speaking
Speech contests
Recitation contests
Exchange tapes with a pen-friend
Button-hole native speakers, on trains, in English-language bookshops
Make foreign friends, in bars or book-shops foreigners frequent
Offer free Japanese lessons in exchange for free English lessons (for a text-book designed for this purpose, see Swanson & Swanson [1990])
Join one of the many English conversation schools

Travel abroad (especially alone, to increase chances of contact with locals)
Home-stay abroad
Listening
Tapes designed to develop listening skills in non-native speakers (readily available from all text-book publishers)
TV and radio shows designed to teach English
Radio stations intended for native-speakers (short wave, FEN)
Radio stations that employ foreign DJs because English is trendy
Satellite TV (one domestic channel broadcasts movies in English with subtitles in Japanese, another has regular news programmes in English from CNN, BBC, ABC with Japanese translation on another audio channel. Foreign signals [even Star] can be received but require expensive equipment)
Sub-titled movies on TV with English sound-track (broadcast about once a month on terrestrial channels, several times a day on satellite)
Movies on TV with multi-plex sound (multi-plex = original sound-track and Japanese translation broadcast on separate audio channels, receiver can select either channel) - broadcast several times a week
Japanese TV news with English translation on a separate audio channel (broadcast almost daily)
Sesame Street (broadcast in English with a Japanese explanation on a separate audio-channel)
Videos of foreign movies (always with Japanese sub-titles)

Closed-captioned videos of movies and situation comedies imported from the US (requires purchase of a decoder)
Foreign movies in a movie-theatre (always with Japanese subtitles)
Listen to foreign pop-songs (tapes/CDs often come with a paper giving the words in English and a Japanese translation)
Exchange tapes with a pen-friend
Button-hole native speakers
Make foreign friends
Offer free Japanese lessons in exchange for free English lessons
Join one of the many English conversation schools
Travel abroad
Home-stay abroad

Initial Awareness of these Resources

A survey was conducted at the beginning of the course to find out to what extent students were aware of these resources. Several of the resources were listed and students were asked if they had ever made use of them for studying English and if they knew how to do so. Students were then asked to list other resources that they knew were available to them for studying English without a teacher.

Responses to the first part of the survey showed that less than 30% had ever made use of any of the resources listed, while the number who had made use of more than two of them was much

smaller. Most students on most items responded that they did not know how to make use of this particular resource.

Students' suggestions for other resources they could make use of were somewhat fanciful. Some wrote of getting a foreign girlfriend or marrying a foreigner, others said they could speak English all day with their friends and one suggested "be born as an English-speaking baby." Another group fell back on traditional study methods: copying words, studying a grammar book, text-book or dictionary, memorising place names (?) and talking with the teacher (a native speaker of English). It was clear from the responses that very few of the students had thought about the matter before and several of them had great difficulty with the concept of studying English without a teacher to tell them which materials to use.

Seven years' acquaintance with English, then, had done little to equip them to make use of the resources around them to maintain their language ability once formal instruction ceased at the end of this course.

Consciousness Raising

The process of raising students' awareness of the resources had two goals: to make them aware that the resources were available and to convince them that they could make use of them without the supervision of a teacher.

The survey described above was the first step towards the first goal. It was intended not only as a means of finding out what the students knew about the resources but also as a way of

having them them begin to think about the possibilities for independent study of English that are to be found in their immediate environment.

After the survey, each module of the course was designed to present a different kind of material to the students. Information was provided about how to find the material, including such practicalities as how to arrange for newspapers to be delivered, exactly where in each bookshop English books are to be found and how to recognise that a native-speaker button-holed in a book-shop would like to end a conversation.

Care was taken to extract as much of this information as possible from the students themselves, in order to show them that they already knew or could easily find out most of the information. This sometimes consisted of simply eliciting the information and at other times it involved homework assignments like: "Find out when you can see TV news about Japan in English. What days? What times? What channels?" It was hoped that this would encourage students to reflect on other things they knew About which could be used as resources for language learning.

One of the requirements for the course was that students should keep a study-diary of occasions when they had studied English during the year. One section of the diary was set aside for further ideas on how they could study. By about the middle of the course most students were producing practical and realistic ideas.

However, without the courage to use them, producing information about resources for English study would be just an abstract intellectual exercise. For this reason, a lot of course-time was spent introducing students to exercises they could do by themselves, using the resources they were becoming aware of. After collecting information about multiplex news broadcasts on television, for example[3], students were guided through the following exercise:

1. Make a video of the day's news broadcast.

2. Identify the main news story.

3. Find an article in a Japanese language newspaper which explains the news story.

4. Predict English words that you will hear in the headline to the story.

5. Play the video of the first headline several times to see if your predictions were correct.

6. Find the same story in an English-language newspaper and predict further words you expect to hear in the headline.

7. Play the video again to check your new predictions.

8. Use a dictionary to check the meaning of any words you have successfully predicted that you do not understand.

It was emphasised to the students at each stage of this exercise that they were engaged in activities they could easily perform without the supervision of the teacher. At the end, they were pleasantly surprised to find they had understood the lead of a very complicated news story and learnt some new words. It was

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[3]For a further, extended, example, see Ryan (in press).

again emphasised to them that they were quite capable of achieving this feeling of satisfaction by themselves. By repeatedly performing exercises of this nature, accompanied by such overt propaganda for learner autonomy, students came to see that not having a teacher was no real hindrance to their exploitation of the language learning resources around them.

Selection Criteria

In the standard Japanese transmission-model of education, resources are selected by the teacher and imposed upon the students. The criteria on which selection decisions are based are assumed to be part of the teacher's professional competence, one of the things that distinguishes the teacher from the students. The result is that none of the students had any experience in selecting materials and it is likely that few of them had even thought about how such decisions are made.

In the course, students were introduced to three criteria for use in selecting texts: interest, intelligibility and feasibility.

Interest

Students were repeatedly told that one of the great joys of studying English without a teacher was that they could select resources which interested them personally: magazines connected with their own hobby, stories of a type they liked to read, news stories that caught their attention. From the reaction of the students, it seemed that few of them had considered the possibility that materials for study could be inherently interesting.

They were encouraged to apply techniques learnt in the course to resources which held some personal interest for them and to record their attempts in their study diaries. A marked reluctance to take on out-of-class assignments and pressure of work from their main subjects of study often prevented them from acting on this suggestion. However, the main reason for making the suggestion was to make them aware of the possibilities should time and motivation permit them to take their English studies further.

At another level, the idea of "whatever interests you" was used to help them to make decisions about the specific language and language skills they wanted to focus on. The resources were presented as a smorgasbord from which they could choose according to taste ("I want to practice listening." "I need to improve my business English.") rather than feeling obliged to choose a balanced diet ("I haven't practiced writing for a long time, so I suppose I'd better do some.").

Intelligibility

This criterion was presented mainly with reference to materials intended for learners of English. When resources designed for various levels of linguistic ability were available (as with graded readers or elementary, intermediate and advanced English courses on the television or radio) the different levels were explained and demonstrated.

Students were encouraged to estimate to which they could understand a text they had read or listened to. They were asked to give a round figure for the percentage of the text they felt they had

understood (10%, 70%). This seemed strange to them at first but they gradually realised that they could improve their estimation by thinking comparatively: "I understood more of this text than the last one. Last time I said 40% so I suppose this must be more like 50%."

The purpose of encouraging such estimation was to overcome the students' feeling that they should not move on to the next level of difficulty before understanding completely texts at the current level. It was suggested to them that 80% comprehension[4] of a previously unseen/unheard text was an acceptable level of mastery before moving on to the next level of graded reader or TV English course. When initially selecting a level at which to begin, they were encouraged to find a level at which they could understand 40-60% of an unknown text.

Feasibility

It was not really possible to apply the criterion of intelligibility to materials produced for a native-speaker audience as such materials are not usually overtly graded by linguistic level. Instead, students were encouraged to select such materials based on the kind of tasks they felt could be achieved with the materials.

They were discouraged from seeking full mastery of resources designed for native speakers as this was thought to be a sure road to frustration. They were discouraged from this both overtly and by the nature of the exercises presented to them in the course. The

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[4]These figures were based entirely on the author's intuition from his own experience as a language learner. They were certainly not presented as rules but as rough guidelines.

exercises never focussed on total mastery as a goal but approached each type of material with a view to learning something from it.

In one module, for example, ways of learning from local English language newspapers were presented and practiced. These newspapers are written at a level of English far above that of the students. They can, however, be used to look for the spelling of proper nouns that feature in the news. A student seeing (from TV news or Japanese language newspaper) that a new Prime Minister had been elected in Greece could look in that day's Japan Times to find out how his or her name was spelt in English.

Thus, the third criterion for resource selection was the feasibility of using a particular resource to achieve a desired task.

Conclusion

It was never intended that the results of this course should be measurable at the end of the year it took to teach. It is clear from students' comments that it has achieved its goal of sensitising them to the resources that are available for autonomous English study and to ways in which they can be exploited. What use the students make of this awareness in the future will be largely a product of circumstances beyond the control of the teacher.

However, it is felt that the course leaves them better equipped to prepare themselves to deal with future calls on their English ability than they were when they started it.

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